

*The Divine Right of Private Judgment
Vindicated. Theology*

IN
ANSWER

to the Reverend

Mr. *Hugh Fisher's* Postscript,

Annex'd to his Preservative from
DAMNABLE Errors, in the
Union of the Holy One.

By *Josiah Smith*, M. A. *K*

Pastor of a Church of CHRIST at Cainboy.

Luk. ix. 54. --- Lord, wilt thou that we com-
mand fire to come down from Heaven and con-
sume them? But he rebuked them, and said,
ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

BOSTON, N.E.

Printed in the Year, 1738



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An ANSWER, &c.



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 HEN Mr. *Fisher* had determin'd to publish his Sermon, in order to take off the Exceptions, which I had made to it, in mine ; it was natural to expect, that he would do me, and the Publick, the Justice, to send it to the *Press*, as it was deliver'd from the *Pulpit*. But, besides the apparent Difficulty of this, where a Minister's Notes are not before him ; he has ingeniously confess'd that the Sermon is alter'd ; and, whether that be consistent with the Fidelity, with which a controverted Sermon, (such as his was) is to be publish'd, the World will judge. His Excuse is ; That the *Heads* of the Discourse are the same ; that no material Passage, or Expression is omitted ; and, that his Enlargements were proper, to illustrate the Matter of the Discourse. If Mr. *Smith* had taken such a Liberty, and given the Publick such a lame Apology, what would the *Subscribers* have said ! Mr. *F*----'s profess'd design was, to vindicate his Sermon (that which was preach'd) from my Misrepresentations, and Exceptions ; and, to do this, he has publish'd another. I call it *another*.

ther, because, it is confessedly *enlarg'd*, and we have nothing, but the Author's Judgment, to rely upon, whether any thing material be *omitted* or no. And, I think, he has now satisfyed the World, that his Sermon needed such Alterations, to carry it thro' the *Press*, and, that my Remarks upon it were too Clear and Just, to let it be seen, in its *first Dress*, without some *proper Enlargements*. And, as the Case now stands, I cannot see, how the World should judge, whether his Charge of *Misrepresentations*, be just upon me, or not: Nor can I think my self oblig'd, to make my Remarks upon the Sermon, he has *publish'd*, any further, than his References in the *Post-script*, might lead me to it.

His *Title*, indeed, makes me Tremble, it breathes *Damnation*; and scatters *Flames*. *Damnable Errors*, is too warm an Expression from a *Protestant Pen*.

"I am well assur'd, that the Wisdom, which comes
"from above, is first pure, and then *peaceable*; that
"we are requir'd, in the Gospel, not to call for
"Fire from Heaven, even upon such *Samaritans*,
"who will not receive Christ at all.

"The Wrath of Man, works not the Righteous-
"ness of God, nor the Knowledge of Christ.
"These angry Fits of Zeal, do but awaken the
"disorderly Passions of Men; and tempt them to re-
"sist every Argument, that comes arm'd with such
"assumed *Sovereignty*, and Fire. Light it self, when
"join'd with Noise and Fire, has not the most
"happy Influence, to improve and refine the Mind,
"Tis only the gentle Approaches of Truth, like
"the Morning Light, which open the Windows of
"the Soul, and make it willing to receive all further
"Discoveries". We might rather expect God, in
"a *still small Voice*, than in *Strong Winds*, *Earthquakes*,
"or *Fire*. However, since I don't apprehend, that
"such a Title, will be thought either an Ornament,
"or Advantage to the Cause, which my zealous Bro-
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ther has espoused, so, the only Notice I shall take of it is, to advise his Readers, to give it the best, and most candid Construction, they find it will bear: Not to think, that a Man of Mr. F----'s Soundness in the Faith, and, who has so much of the Unction of the *Holy One*, as to make *his* Sentiments of Fundamentals, a Test to all others, could ever slide into such a Fundamental (for I don't love to say *Damnable*) Error, as to blaspheme the *Holy Ghost*. However unhappy he was, in his way of expressing it, his Meaning, certainly, was ; that *the Unction of the Holy One, was a good Preservative against damnable Errors.*

Having given the Reader this necessary Caution, I dismiss the *Title*, and pass to the large *Postscript*, which the Reverend Author has annex'd to his *Sermon*, and wherein he professedly undertakes, to vindicate himself, and confute me.

He begins with an Apology, (*pag. 31.*) " for touching upon a Controversy, which (mark it, Reader) has of late years, disturb'd and inflam'd several Churches. " Well, what, what is it ? Why, " in General, it must be said, that they, who raise Debates against Truth, must, in reason, be guilty of the Commotions occasion'd by such Controversies. " But as Pilate once said, What is *Truth* ? The Resolution of this short Question, is the thing, we have always demanded of our Subscribing Brethren, and what would quickly *Quench* the Fire, that has inflam'd the Churches. We think the *Scripture* is the Truth ; The Faith *once* deliver'd to the Saints. And who has rais'd Debates against it ? Or, who are the Gainsayers, whose Mouths must be stopp'd ? not we ; for it seems to be our only fault, in some Men's Opinion, that we adhere too closely to it, and are too stiff & warm in defending it. 'Tis evident to the World, that we only stand for the defence of those Truths, of which, we, and the Church of God in all Ages, have always been possess'd. We could

could not be the first Aggressors, and Authors of these Debates; because not we, but our Opposers have brought in these new Notions, of an *Imposing Power*, and such a *Right of judging in Private Christians*, as is entirely limited by a pretended Church Authority; whereby the Church is disturbed in her Ancient Possession of the *Bible*; so that, unless to stand up in defence of great and important Truths, be to inflame and disturb the Church, we can't be chargeable with that Guilt; I say, great and Important Truths; seeing it's for the *Scripture Doctrine* of Faith it self; *express'd in the words of the Holy Ghost*; as also for the Authority of Scripture, in opposition to a *Right* pleaded for to some, to impose upon us their *Humane Schemes*, and that, in the most Arduous Points of Faith; and also for the Fences of the Lord's Vineyard, that the Hedge may not be plucked down, to let in the Boars of the Forest, to destroy the Vines, under the specious pretences of *Authority and Zeal*, that we contend.

As for the occasion of his *Preaching*, what he has now pretended to Publish, I refer him to the *Reverend Brother*, "who first advanc'd, he says, The *new Vampt Right of Private Judgment*." Only would have the Reader observe, That, if the advancing a Doctrine, contrary to Mr. *F---*'s Opinion, can justify his taking such a Publick Notice of it, it must be an obvious piece of Injustice, to condemn the Notice, that I have taken, of what appeared to me, a very *Indefensible Doctrine* in him. Seeing, to borrow his own words, *I tho't, I owed as Publick a Testimony to Truth, as had been given to Error*.

He next acquaints the World with the "Necessity he was under of publishing his Sermon, with some Remarks upon mine; which he intimates, was not without the concurrent judgment of others." But if there was such a plain necessity, for Publishing *that* Sermon, why did he suppress it, and Publish another?

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It seems "He is sorry, that he has Mr. S. for his "Antagonist," and gives a Complement to his natural Powers. And I am no less sorry, that I have Mr. F. for mine; whose Parts and Piety I always honour. How much more agreeable had it been to me, to have lived in a perfect good understanding with him, and the other Brethren of the Subscribing Side, than thus to enter the Lists with him, in Debates, which too often gender Strife? And seeing, as it seems, we must differ in our Judgments, how much rather had I, that an end to the Controversie had been endeavour'd in some amicable Conference (which I never oppos'd) than, that a Controversy, already Exhausted, by so many celebrated Writers, on both sides, should ever have been bro't, *on so light a pretence, into Charlestown Pulpit?* But, as matters now stand, we have no choice, but either, as false Friends to Truth, suffer it to fall in the Street, without putting a hand to support it, or else to meet Mr. F. in his own way. For whatever has been said by others, to overthrow his Principles; some will account his Performance unanswerable, if it be not particularly answered, and so it shall confirm such in the mistaken Notions, they learn from it; and perhaps infect others.

The next Thing, that occurs in Mr. F---'s Postscript, and what particularly requires my Notice, is, That the excuse I offer'd for *printing* my Sermon, had little or no foundation. "That I was in "too much haste, to Enquire into the matter of Fact duly."

This many are surpriz'd at, who could tell him, what noise and clamour was made about it, and, in what a Disadvantageous Light, it was represented. And, because this is a Charge, which calls my Veracity in Question, and is so directly levell'd, against the *moral* Part of my Conduct; I believe, I may presume upon the Candor, of a certain Friend, of Subscribing Principles, so far as to publish a Passage

page or two, out of a *private Letter*, which he wrote me, after my Sermon came over from the Press. "This Week (says he to me) I read your late printed Sermon, preach'd at *Charlestown*, before the Reverend Presbytery there. You are sensible, The *fama Clamosa* (the noisy Report) was great, and you accus'd, both in *Town* and *Country*, of being no less than a *Semi-Arian*. I well approve of your *printing* it". One would think by this, that Mr. *Fisher*, was neither acquainted, in *Town*, nor *Country*, that he could hear so little, or nothing, of my Sermon, and not one *Titlle* of the Misrepresentations, that I speak of in the Preface to it. And he had as little Reason to suggest, that I took timely Care, to have the honourable mention, I had made of the *Westminster Confession*, read to my own Congregation, for I took no Care about it, till one of the *Deacons* desired my Notes from me, and then, I gave him the *whole* Sermon, and not that Paragraph only, as my Reverend Brother not without some Views, seems to insinuate.

Having now excus'd, as he thinks, the Alterations made in *his own* Sermon, he prepares himself to make Remarks upon *mine*. And what he first observes, in general, is ; "That Mr. *Smith* explains no Terms, but satisfies himself, in a declamatory Way, to display his Eloquence, in running down Impositions, and pleading for a Right of private Judgment, without acquainting the Reader, what he understands, either by the one, or the other". Now I can't but wonder, that Mr. *F.* should charge me with this ; 'when he has cited a Passage from me, where the Right of private Judgment is explain'd, "by receiving no Doctrines, but what we have first *Examin'd* by the Scriptures, and found agreeable to them." And Imposition being understood as a direct *Opposite* to that Right, the Sense of both, is necessarily fix'd and determin'd together. And if the odious Names, he mentions, of *plucking*

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out People's Eyes, & denying them the Liberty of reading the Scriptures, naturally flow, from Subscribing Principles, I am not culpable, for fixing them there, whether Subscribers will own them or not: But if they do not, every Man is at Liberty, to reject them. And as for *cloathing Men with Bear-skins, to raise the Fury of the Populace against them*; no Man is more guilty than he. What else means his *Title*, and the frequent Insinuations, that he makes thro' his *Post-script*? Why does he represent my Principles, as founded in *Scepticism*, and giving Countenance to *Atheists*? Verily, calling such hard and horrid Names, and pretending, that "we are afraid to explain our Terms, and that the Right of private Judgment, for which we plead, is too gross for the People, to be let into the Meaning of, at once; and an enemy to Truth, and Piety," is such a *Bear-skin*, as may set some unthinking People, against the Rights of Conscience, to the no small damage of the Church of God. But then, where is the *Ingenuity of a fair Disputant*, which might have been expected in Mr. F.?

He comes now to some particular Remarks upon my *Preface*, and, because he has a better Notion of Method than I, he first singles out the following Propositions, viz. One of my Reverend Brethren, endeavours to fix it (the imposing Power) upon the *Unction of the Holy One*; inferring from thence, an infallible Knowledge of what are really the Fundamentals, and Essentials of Christianity, in every one that was anointed: Where he says, "The judicious Reader will easily perceive, that, inferring an infallible Knowledge, even of Fundamentals &c. is charg'd on me, as a false Foundation of the false Principles, about imposing; so that, Mr. S. at the same time, declares for no infallible Knowledge, even of the Fundamentals, by the *Unction of the Holy One*."

If the Reader will cast his Eye a little back, he will find, that Mr. F. lays it down, as a good Rule, in Controversy, "to make a most candid Scrutiny into the Mind of his Adversary". Had he observ'd his own Rule here, and practis'd the Candor, himself, which he has recommended to others, he would never have charg'd me, with a Doctrine, that is plainly destructive of all Christianity. The judicious Reader will find, when he comes to compare, the several parts of my Preface, and Sermon, relating to the present Debate, together, that I neither affirm nor deny, the *Inference* from the *Uction* of the Holy One, viz. *An infallible Knowledge of what is really Essential to Salvation, in all the Anointed*; but only deny his *Consequence* from it, viz. *A Power of imposing their Sentiments upon us*. This was the Doctrine which appear'd to me, so extensive and pernicious; and what, I thought, was scarcely reconcilable with Protestant and reforming Principles.

We must always distinguish betwixt the *Truth* of a Thing, and the *Relation* it has, to what is inferred from it; the *Truth* may be acknowledged, and yet the *Consequence*, for very good Reasons, denied: The Sun, for instance, may shine, and can't be disputed, but to infer from thence, that it Rains, is a false inference, and must, as such, be denied. So in the present Case, whoever is anointed, may infallibly know all Fundamentals, that are *really* such; but if any from thence infer, that they have a Power to impose all that is tho't Fundamental, the Consequence, may be denied, while the Principle it self is granted: 'Tis a true *Principle*; but 'tis a false *foundation*, for such a Consequence.

I always allowed, that a Christian is, so far under the influence of the *Holy Ghost*; that he certainly, and beyond a possibility of mistake, knows what is *really* Essential to Salvation. At the same time, I think, it can never be proved, that every Article, which

which he may esteem Fundamental, must be really such. And this, I am told, was the Judgment of one, that was a chief Advocate for Subscription, *alias* Imposition. Now, if every such Article, be not Fundamental, then every such Article can't be imposed, as a Fundamental; and if every Article may not, the Consequence is, that we ought to impose *none*; unless we could run the limits, and exactly determine, which of the Articles is *really* Fundamental, and can't be dispensed with, and which is only *suppos'd* to be such. I have no Controversy with my Reverend Brother, whether *Believers* shall know what is *really* Fundamental, to their Salvation: This I am as zealous to maintain, as he. For, if a man go to Heaven, who can doubt, but he shall know, what is necessary to carry him there? But the *first*, tho' not the *only* Hinge, on which the Controversy turns, is this, *viz.* Whether a Synod of Ministers, are infallible, and beyond all possibility of Mistake, in all that they *think*, and *call* Fundamental? This Mr. F. must solidly prove, before he can infer a power in them, to impose *their* Sense upon us; and to do this, he must first make it Evident, either that Ministers have the infallible Conduct of the Spirit, in all that they *esteem* Fundamental; or else, that the Conduct of the Spirit is not necessary, to make them infallible, in things of that nature.

If he supposes the first, *viz.* That Ministers have the infallible Conduct of the Spirit, in all that they *think* Fundamental; how comes it to pass, that they who are of equal repute, not only for Learning, but *Piety*, are no better Agreed, when they come to fix and *determine*, the precise *number* of these Fundamentals? Some *multiplying*, and others *reducing* them? A particular instance of which, may be seen in Dr. Calamy's Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's Life, Vol. 1. pag. 120, &c.

If he suppose the latter, *viz.* That the Conduct of the Spirit, is not necessary, in things of that nature;

ture; then, with respect to infallible Knowledge, the Christian has no advantage over the Sinner; they stand upon a level, their Authority becomes the same; and Mr. *F.* might have spared his learned Arguments, to prove, that Christians knew all things, from the *Unction* of the *Holy One*.

Had he not confounded, what ought to have been distinguish'd; and taken for granted, what he ought to have *prov'd*, he might have spared his Invectives, and had less room to display his Eloquence.

I cannot see, what Mr. *F.* means, when he charges me, with an illogical way of Reasoning, from a few Particulars, to a universal. I wish he had pointed to the *Page*, where I say, that a Believer must be certain of *every* things, if certain of *Fundamentals*. I see nothing like it, either in my *Preface* or *Sermon*. All that I inferr'd, from his Doctrine of Faith, was this, viz. That, if Infallibility deriv'd from the *Unction* of the *Holy One*, then all that are anointed, must be, *so far*, (not in *every* thing), equally infallible; from whence I argued that private Christians stood upon a parr, in point of Knowledge, with *Synods* and *Assemblies*, and therefore, a Power of *imposing*, could not be argued from thence, in *Ministers*, unless the same Power were granted to *private Christians*. So that my *Logick*, I suppose, is good, whatever becomes of my *Cause*: And Mr. *F.* fond of Victory, and Triumph, has only made a Man of Straw, that he might again hew him to pieces.

After a page, or more, spent in what no way affects me, he falls very hard upon the late Bishop of *Bangor*, and the great and celebrated *Lock*, "advising Tutors to recommend, and Students to peruse, that Gentleman's Writings, with due Caution". But these are such great Characters, and so well establish'd; that they will need no Pen to support them. I pass therefore to the top of his 40. Page; where, he says, "He is willing to think, that Mr. *S.*'s denying the infallible Knowledge
" of

“ of Faith, or its certainty, beyond a possibility of
 “ mistake, is owing to an inadvertent slip in his
 “ Pen, rather than to his settled Judgment. ”

I heartily thank him for his *Charity* here, and
 the more because it so rarely occurs in his Postscript;
 but think, he should first have prov'd, that my Pen
 had made such a slip.

I have indeed denied such a certainty, as he
 speaks of, in what a *Body* of Ministers may call
 Fundamental, but not in what is *really* so. And I
 think I may persist in this Principle, without ren-
 dering the whole of Religion, a meer Uncertainty.
 As for the following Enumeration of Articles, which
 he thinks it dangerous not to suppose beyond the
possibility of all mistake; I shall not debate it with
 him; but shall only say this, That they are
 either *really* Fundamental, or they are not. If they
 are *not*, there can be no great danger, in doubting
 them; if they *are*, I have already acknowledg'd,
 that by the conduct of the Spirit, we shall know
 them, to such a certainty, as is beyond the possibility
 of Mistake, and such a Doctrine carries less horror
 with it, to Christian Ears, than Mr. F. pretends, and
 a great deal less, than the *Title* of his Sermon.

He spends his next Page, in a very declamatory
 Strain, still supposing, that I deny Infallibility in the
real Fundamentals of Religion; from whence he en-
 deavours to shew that my Principles appear to clash
 with my *Sermon*: But, having so well explain'd my
 self upon that Head already, I shall not repeat it
 here; nor take notice of any thing, that he has
 dropt in the *Harrangue*, except it be this one Ob-
 servation, viz. “ That Ministers being obliged, as
 “ Mr. S. tells us, to speak the whole Truth, they
 “ must tell the People (after they have done their
 “ best, to make the Doctrine, they preach, appear
 “ probable) that, notwithstanding all they have
 “ said it may possibly be no more than a Mistake ”.
 By the *Doctrine they preach*, must be intended, ei-
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ther the particular Texts of Scripture, on which their Discourses are suppos'd to be founded, or else the Discourses themselves : If the first ; we dare not tell our People, that our Doctrine may, possibly, be no more than a Mistake, because, in making the Scriptures the Standard of Truth (which all the World must know, is our *darling* Principle) we, of necessity, make and allow them to be *infallibly* true ; but if the latter ; I ask, what harm there would be in *that* ; Or, would Mr. *F.* himself, when he has finish'd a Sermon, dare to tell his People, that all he has preach'd is beyond the possibility of Mistake ? If so, he has a better Opinion of his Judgment, than I have of mine, and *Dorchester* and *Rome* may quickly contend for the *Chair* : For my own part, I readily own, and always did, that the *Scriptures* themselves are infallible, but never desire, my Doctrine should be tho't so any further than it can bear the Test of *inspired* Writings ; which is far from " Teaching of Infidelity, or a Teaching of " People to question and disbelieve all the Doctrines " of Salvation ".

He still go's on with his Charges, " What makes, " says he, the prevailing, of the Non-Subscribing " Principles, most terrible ; is, that they are found- " ed, in this miserable Scepticism ; and, that a Man " must necessarily be a Sceptick, if he will be, an " intelligent and cordial Non-Subscriber ". But this is all *gratis dictum*, and has a greater Appearance of *Calumny*, than *Truth* ; for if we believe Mr. *Fisher*, " The Scepticks profess'd universal Uncertainty " ; but Non-Subscribers (or I am not of their Principles) allow a certainty in the *Fundamentals* of Religion, that there are such things, and that every *Christian* will sufficiently *know* them. But it seems, we are Scepticks, because we profess a religious Adherence to our *Bibles*, and will receive nothing for Truth, much less a *Fundamental* Truth, upon the bare Authority of *Man*, however *unscriptural* it appear to

us.

us. If this be *Septicism*, the *Bereans* themselves were Scepticks; and if they were more noble than those of *Thessalonica*, I see no Reason we have to be ashamed of the Character; and since Mr. F. brings in Dr. *Owen* to Patronize his Cause, I will finish this Head with some of his Sentiments on it.

“ No Judge of Heresy, (says the Dr.) since the Apostle’s Day, but hath been obnoxious to Error in that Judgment; and those who have been forwardest to assume a Judicature, and power of discerning between Truth and Error, so as to have others regulated thereby, have erred most foully (a passage worthy Mr. F---’s Notice) of old, it was generally conceived to be in *Councils*. Now I should acknowledge my self oblig’d to any Man, that would direct me to a Council, since *that*, Act. 15. which I may not be forced, from the Word, to assert, that it, in something or other, went astray. ” This is the judgment of that Great Divine, in his Collect. Sermon. p. 227. as I find him cited by Mr. *Bennet*, in his *Irenicum*, pag. 63. To which I may add some passages from the Excellent Mr. *I. Watt*’s, as eminent a Scholar, and Christian, as our Age, perhaps, has ever produced. This Celebrated Writer, in his *PREFACE* to *Three Dissertations*, relating to the Christian Doctrine of the *Trinity*, thus expresses himself. “ Some (says he) will make it a matter of offence & scandal, that I don’t write with that full assurance of every thing, as others would do in the like case. To this I answer, that since the Studies of these last Years, I think I am establish’d afresh in the belief of the *Deity of Christ*, and the *Blessed Spirit*, and assured of it, upon sufficient grounds, that they are One with the Father in God-head, tho’ they are represented in Scripture, as *Distinct Persons*; but as to the various, particular *Explications* of this *Doctrine*, and *incidental Arguments*, that attend it, I desire to believe and write with an humble

“ Consci-

* Consciousness of my own Ignorance, and to give
 " my assent, but in proportion to the degrees of
 " Light and Evidence. I am perswaded, if every
 " Man would proportion his assent by the same
 " Rule, much of our *Modern* assurance would be a-
 " bated ; we should have but few *Dogmatists*
 " among us, even in some *important* Doctrines ; and
 " perhaps, the most positive and most confident As-
 " sertors of their own Opinions, would become the
 " most doubtful and modest of all Men. Besides,
 " when I consult the Scripture, or Humane Writers,
 " on so sublime a Subject, I don't come with all
 " my opinions, fix'd and determin'd, but I read in
 " order to receive further light ; and therefore I
 " would write as one, who may be mistaken, and
 " who is honestly seeking Truth. I know the weak-
 " ness of Humane Understanding, and how easily
 " we are led into Error. I have often seen occasi-
 " on, to retract my former Sentiments, and correct
 " them by further discoveries ; and I esteem a *mo-*
 " *dest* and *cautious manner of Speech*, in most of the
 " Controverted Points, to be one Excellency of a
 " *fallible* Writer, and *retraction of an Error*, to be
 " yet a superiour Attainment " ? And he " concludes
 " his Preface with one Request to his *Readers*, of every
 " kind, whether *Arian*, or *Athenasian*, and that is, that
 " they would not make all their *former*, nor their *present*
 " opinions, an everlasting *Standard* of Truth, & a *Test*,
 " whereby to judge of every Thing they read : and
 " that, they would not suddenly pronounce, *Non-*
 " *sense* or *Heresy*, upon every Sentence, that differs
 " from their *former* Belief. " Mr. F. must be an *A-*
 " *dept* in the art of distinguishing, if he can justify
 " these Writers, and at the same time charge me with
 " *Scepticism*, and I cannot but hope, that a Man of so
 " serious and tho'tful a Temper, when he has read
 " these Passages, will see the vanity and folly, of mak-
 " ing his *present* opinion an everlasting *Standard* of
 " Truth, and will not suddenly pronounce, *Nonsense*
 or

or *Heresy*, upon every Sentence, that differs from his former Belief.

I cannot see the force of *that* Argument, viz. "That if it be granted that according to Scripture, Faith of the Fundamentals, (*real* Fundamentals) and Essentials of Christianity, is certain knowledge, which cannot possibly be a mistake ; and that this is the common Privilege of true Christians ; it will necessarily follow, that all true Christians, have a *Common Creed* : " For if by a *Common Creed*, Mr. F. intends *one*, and the *same* set of Principles, I deny both the *Truth*, and the *Consequence*. I can never believe, But true Christians may form different Notions, and some *think* that a Fundamental, which others may *deny* to be so ; and I am the more confirm'd in this Opinion, since I have read the debate betwixt that eminent Servant of *Christ*, Mr. R. Baxter, and the other eminent *Divines*, which were deputed, to draw up a Scheme of *Fundamentals*, to lay them before the *Parliament*. For as Dr. Calamy observes, " This Proposition was brought in among others under the Head of the Scriptures, *That no Man could know God to Salvation, by any other means* : Which Mr. Baxter asserted, was neither *Fundamental* nor *Truth* ; and argued the Point, and afterwards gave them his Reasons, in Writing."

Mr. F. must either question Mr. Baxter's Christianity, (which I confess, would tempt me to question *his own*) or else allow, that all Christians may not have, in *his* sense, a *Common Creed*. But if I should grant the *Truth*, yet I can't see the *Consequence* ; for if the Argument be put into form, it must run thus ; If true Christians agree in what is *really* Fundamental, they must also agree, in what they *call* Fundamental. But, &c. Ergo, &c. This is certainly *illogical*, and if this Consequence fall, the other, that depends upon it, cannot stand. Ministers are capable of no such Authority, as he pretends ; for (to use his own way of Reasoning) if

uncertainty of Faith, in Things that are call'd Fundamental, or only a certainty, which may possibly be a mistake, be allowed; there can be no Consistency in Creeds, and Church-Authority, to require assent to them. So that Mr. F. is for once mistaken; when he says, pag. 43. "That it's upon this (*viz.* whether there be certainty in Divine Faith, at least in Fundamentals, *real* Fundamentals, or not) that as a *Hinge*, the whole of the present Controversy turns." This is not the *Hinge*; This I never disputed; but as I said before, the possibility of mistake, in all that are esteem'd and call'd Fundamentals.

From what has been said, it's easy to learn, what I meant; when I profess'd my Agreement with him, in the *Doctrinal* part of his Sermon, but not in his *Inferences*; *viz.* That tho't all Christians, were acquainted with *real* Fundamentals, but could not from thence conclude their Infallibility, in what they might suppose Fundamental; so that he had no occasion to say, I have altered my Opinion, for fear of his Inferences for Creeds, and the Consistency of allowing Ministerial Authority, *such as he pleads for*, "were too native to be denied," or if I had, I should only have appeal'd, what I always profess'd to be a fallible Man, and subject to mistake.

The next Remark that he makes on my Preface, is, where I oppose Imposition, in matters of pure Speculation and Faith. Upon which he observes, "that (to me) matters of Faith, are matters of pure Speculation, and therefore of no concernment to practical Religion." To show the danger, and absurdity of which, he employs his Eloquence for near five pages.

But is there no sense, wherein matters of Faith, may be matters of pure Speculation? Are not all the Truths of the Gospel, matters of Faith? Are not the same Truths objects of the Understanding? Are not objects of the Understanding matters of Speculation? and as such, matters of pure Speculation? If so; then matters

matters of *Faith*, may be matters of *pure Speculation*, in their *nature*, and yet of practical concernment, in their *effects* and consequence; many Speculations that are *purely* so, in themselves, having a happy tendency to influence the heart and practice. What, for instance, has a happier tendency to affect our Minds, than the Adorable Perfections of the Divine Nature? And yet these are all, so far as they lie before the *understanding*, *pure Speculations*. But supposing the *propriety* of that Expression, should be disputed, a very little candor and scrutiny, would have seen it's *intention*. I was willing to inform the World, that the Controversy was not concerning the extent of an Ecclesiastical Authority in *practical* matters, whether the Church had power, to censure and correct the miscarriages of it's Members; but in matters of *Opinion*, whether a Synod of Ministers had power to impose the Articles of *their Faith* upon others, before they are examin'd, and found to accord with the *Scriptures*: And *Speculation* being generally taken, in direct opposition to *practice*, I tho't it was the properest term I could use, to explain to my Reader, what I intended by *Faith*, especially when I added the Epithet, and made it *pure Speculation*.

I pass to his 48th pag. to consider the Remarks he bestows on my *Sermon*. And his first Remark is on my 8th pag. where I say, *As great a Novelty, as a Right of private Judgment may appear to some Eyes, which I thus explain in my Preface, denied a Liberty in People to judge for themselves, and (if I retain his Phrase) to believe as they see Reason.* Where he says, "I insinuate, that he had opposed a Right of private Judgment, without a distinction;" which he flatly denies, and for proof, appeals to his *Sermon*, and a *Paper* of his, which I had in my Hand, before his *Sermon* was *Preach'd*. He first appeals to his *Sermon*: But *which* of the *Sermons*? That which was *preach'd*, or that which he *publish'd*? He

can't appeal to the *first*, because it has never appear'd to the World: nor yet to the *last*, because my Remarks were publish'd before it. And what doth he mean by appealing? Have we a Right to judge of his Sermon, or no? if not; why does he refer us to it? If we have; why may we not also judge of the *Scripture*? Or does he know the sense of the *Spirit*, better than his *own*? However, since it explains his Sentiments, let us examine the Passages, to which he refers, in the *Paper* it self. "What I take, says he, to be the opinion of the Orthodox, concerning a Right of private Judgment, *common to Men*, is,

I. "They teach, that every Man has a Right, to try all Doctrines by the Scripture, which are deliver'd unto them, and to see Truth with their own Eyes, in that great summary of Divine Truths, not giving an implicit credit to any Teachers; and that because God refers us ultimately to His Word, to the Law and to the Testimony: Therefore Christ himself refers his Hearers to the Scriptures; to try his Doctrine by them, *Job. 5. 39*. And the *Bereans* are commended, as Noble by the Spirit, because they searched the Scripture, to see, if what things, *Paul*, an Infallible Teacher, taught them, were so or not." What! do the *Orthodox* teach thus? And does this explain Mr. F---'s Sentiments of private Judgment? Then I acknowledge my Charge was unjust; and we are perfectly agreed. 'Tis all I have pleaded for; and the Debate would now come to an end, were it not for his *Retraction* in the following words: "In either of which instances, says he, it's absurd to suppose, that the Hearers had liberty, to reject the Doctrines, they were to examine by Scripture." What! whether they appear'd consonant to Scripture or not? To what end, did they *Examine*? Examination, in it's very nature, implies a Right, both to embrace and reject, according as the things examin'd shall appear; and

and 'tis trifling in a *Synod*, to tell us, we may *Examine* their Doctrines by the rule of Faith, when they at the same time oblige us to embrace them, whether we can *see* their Harmony with Scripture or no: It would be fairer dealing, to tell us, once for all, we must submit to all their Determinations, than to pretend, we may *Examine*, but not on any account, whatever, *Reject* them; if we must see with *their* Eyes at last, better do it at *first*, and save our selves the trouble of searching, whether these things be so. But if this be seeing with *our own* Eyes, and not giving an *implicit* Credit to our Teachers, I leave my Reader to judge. However, to set Mr. F--'s Argument in the strongest light, I will suppose his meaning to be, That we have a Right of judging, according to Scripture, and that the *Bereans* were commended for embracing what was *really* agreeable to Truth, and had no Right to reject it; but in answer to this, I would offer the following Things.

1. I may enquire, what he *means* by judging according to Scripture?

Do's any Man, who makes the Scripture his Rule, think, that the Judgment he forms, is not agreeable to it? Or can we judge of what is *real* Scripture, any further, than it *appears*? if not, it's the *apprehension* of Truth, and not the *reality*, that affects and determines the Judgment.

2. The *Bereans* are commended, not so much for receiving the Word, because it was true in it self, *antecedent* to their *Examination*, but because they *search'd*, and *found* it to be true; and if they were govern'd, by *their* apprehensions of Truth, why should not we by *ours*? If Mr. F. denies us this, he denies what the Orthodox grant, or else his instance of the *Bereans*, is an impertinent proof of the *Orthodox* Sentiments.

3. The Argument holds as strong against *examining*, as it do's against *rejecting*; for why should a *real*

real Truth, be *question'd* and *examin'd*, till it appear to be so ; and not *rejected*, if it should appear to be false ?

4. 'Tis but justice, that the Subscribers should observe the same Rule in imposing, which they prescribe to us in judging ; and *impose* nothing but real Truths, and then the Question will be, whether all, or which of the Doctrines, to be imposed, are *really* true ? And how that can be resolv'd, without immediate recourse to their Judgments, I can't imagine ; if therefore *they* follow the conduct of *their* Judgment, why should not *we*, the conduct of *ours* ? especially, when we both pretend to form them by the *same* Rule ? unless it could be prov'd that *theirs* is *infallible*, and *ours* the reverse.

The second Thing, which Mr. F. says the Orthodox teach, relating to private Judgment, is the same, for *substance*, with what we have seen ; and so, *mutatis mutandis*, the same Reply will serve. And I can now appeal to the World, if Mr. F. has allow'd any more than a *nominal* Right of Judgment, *common* to *Men*, and whether I had not reason enough, to charge him, with what I did ? But if so, how came I, in a *private Letter* to acknowledge, that he maintain'd a *Right* in the *same* Sense, and Latitude, as the *Orthodox* did ? I answer, that I never took him, in the point of private Judgment, to be of such Sentiments, as, he tells us, the *Orthodox* were ; but what I said, was purely to *Banter*, and show, how inconsistent he was with himself ; first, in granting a *Right* of Judgment, and then in advancing against it, an *imposing* Power ; and for this, I appeal to the *Letter* it self, which I the rather *publish*, because it will give the World, some further evidence, of the obligations my Character laid me under, to preach upon a *Controversy*, which Mr. F. himself had *commenc'd*.

R. D. B.

R. D. B.

This accompanies the Manuscript which you put in to my Hand, on the Principles of Modern Liberty, as you are pleas'd to style it. And to speak my Sentiments freely, I think you have done but little hurt to the Bishop, and much less have you reach'd the Cause of Liberty, thro' his sides : Nor can I find where the Bishop contends for more, than a Liberty of People's trying every thing by the Scripture, which you your self make one of the Concessions of the Orthodox : And I believe you would think your self wrong'd, not to be number'd with them. So that you and his Lordship are better Friends than you are aware of. However, as you have taken the freedom, to make your Notions of Private Judgment, publick, from the Pulpit of Charleston, I shall with your leave, (which pray signify as soon as possible) use the same freedom from the same pulpit, with all the Moderation I am Master of : Still subscribing my self, tho' a Non-Subscriber, your affectionate Brother,

Josiah Smith.

Mr. F. having now shown, as he thinks, the injustice of my Charge, comes to show the foundation, upon which, he says, it was fixed. "It seems, says he, the thing that displeased Mr. Smith, and made him alledge, that I denied all Right of private Judgment was, that in the 1 Inf. in my Use of Re- futation; I say, that it's upon the ground of the uncertainty of Faith, that Arminians plead for the innocency of Error, and for a Right to every Man, to think as he sees cause either way, about all Principles of reveal'd Religion. This is the Sentence, that Mr. Smith pretends to quote, from his Memory, and miserably misrepresents ; not at all retaining my phrase, as is manifest." Manifest ! How is it manifest ? How should the World know, whether

whether what Mr. F. here cites from his *Sermon*, was deliver'd from the *Pulpit*? It's possible, the words, *either way*, upon which the evasion principally turns, were not in his *Notes*. They might be one of the *proper* enlargements, that his *Sermon* receiv'd, before it was published; Or if they were in his *Notes*, it will not follow, that they were deliver'd from the *Pulpit*; and I am well assured they were not; but that he *there* denied a Right to People, to believe as they *see reason*; ABSOLUTELY, and without a **DISTINCTION**. Tho' whether it was owing, to an inadvertent slip of his *Tongue*, rather than to his settled *Judgment*, I shall not determine.

He now shifts his Weapons, and having been at some pains, to explain, what he meant by *seeing Cause*; and from thence infer'd, that he had dropp'd nothing contrary to a right of judging according to Divine Revelation; he charges *that* or something like it upon me. But has he mention'd the place, where I maintain such a Principle? No, he honestly declares, that I have not, either in my *Preface* or *Sermon* defin'd the Right of Private Judgment, I am pleading for; but left *that* to be gather'd by a train of Consequences; which "(says he) because
 " I would not trouble the *Reader* with, I shall quote
 " two *Propositions*, which after Mr. S. had written
 " them with his own Hand, he declar'd to the Pres-
 " bytery, did sincerely express his Sentiments of a
 " Right of Private Judgment.

Since Mr. F. has Recourse to my *private* Sentiments, I hope the Reader will take the acknowledgment, that he had no foundation for his Charge, in what I have *publish'd*, and that the train of Consequences, which, he thinks, might support such a Charge, is only a *Chimera* of his own Brain. But let us hear what the *Propositions* are.

" The first of these *Propositions*, says he, Mr. S. expressed thus, *That there is* (it should have been was) *in Mr. PIERCE, as good a Right to*
 " declare

" declare his *Sentiments of the Divinity of Christ, as*
 " in any other, of what *Orthodox Character* soever,
 " supposing *Christ's Divinity a matter of Debate.*"
 The Advantage Mr. F. makes of this *Proposition*,
 is ; that I allow an *equal Right* to declare, either
 way, for or against the *Divinity of Christ.*" But if
 he had not forgot his *own Rule*, and had made but
 a *candid Scrutiny*, into my Mind, he would have
 seen, that I only pleaded for a general Liberty in
 People, to declare their *Sentiments upon* the Truth ;
 not entring into the Controversy, whether they might
 declare them *against* the Truth : That, where any
 Point of Faith, is debated, as the *Divinity of our Blef-*
sed Lord very evidently is, there Mr. *Pierce*, or any
 other Man, has a Right, to speak his *Sentiments*
upon it ; to give his *opinion*, whether the thing be
true or false : And that an *Orthodox Name and Cha-*
acter, should pass for nothing, while the sense, of
 what is disputed, is *undetermin'd*. If Mr. F. had not
 manifestly wrested these words, to lay some found-
 ation for his imaginary Charge, with a visible de-
 sign to wound my *Character*, when he could not
 Answer my *Arguments*, he need not have spent a
 Page upon it.

The second *Proposition*, wherein he says, I pro-
 fess'd to explain my opinion, under my Hand, is
 this, *Every man is obliged to pursue the immediate*
dictates of his Conscience ; so far as *these dictates are*
erroneous, so far he is culpable. Whether I be so
 singular, in the last Clause of this *Proposition*, as to
 desert the Non-Subscribers, may admit of more De-
 bate, than Mr. F. is aware of : I hardly think, that
 any judicious *Non-Subscribers* will deny, that a Man
 is responsible for the *erroneous dictates of his Con-*
science ; where the fault (which is the sense, I
 meant *that clause of the Proposition in*, and which
 I should have mention'd, had I known Mr. F.'s
 temper, so perfectly before, as I have done since)
 is *his own*, and did not originally proceed, from a
 defect

defect in his natural Powers ; tho' at the same time, they may assert, that he is oblig'd to follow its immediate Dictates ; because, however erroneous in themselves, they then appear the *reverse* to him ; or if I have herein deserted my *Brethren*, it will only infer that my Principles are form'd upon the *evidence* of Truth itself, and not the *Authority* of them that maintain it ; which I suppose can be no disparagement.

Nor can I see, what should make Mr. F. at a loss, how to reconcile this with the Right given to Mr. Pierce in the former Proposition. What inconsistency is it, to say that Mr. P. has a right to give his opinion, in a Point that is debated ; and, that a Man is culpable for the *ERRONEOUS* dictates of his Conscience ? I think the Propositions are hardly related enough, to see whether they be consistent, or not. As to the former part of this Proposition, viz. That every Man is oblig'd to follow the dictates of his Conscience ; notwithstanding that these Dictates may be sometimes erroneous ; I think it is easily prov'd. For if it be a Sin not to follow those Dictates, the Consequence is plain, that we are oblig'd to follow them. But that it is a Sin not to follow them, appears from hence, viz. That the Dictates of Conscience are in a formal respect the Will of God. This is Dr. Ames's judgment in the Case : *Conscientia, quamvis errans semper ligat ; ita ut ille peccet, qui agit contra Conscientiam.* i. e. Conscience, tho' erroneous, always binds. So that whoever acts against his Conscience, therein Sins. The Reason of which is subjoin'd, *Ratio est, quoniam, agens contra Conscientiam, agit contra voluntatem Dei, quamvis non materialiter et vere tamen formaliter, et interpretative : Quia quod Conscientia dictat, dictat sub ratione voluntatis Dei.* The Reason is, because, he, who acts against his Conscience, acts against the Will of God, tho' not in regard of matter, and truth, yet formally, and by way of interpretation ; Because, what Conscience dictates, it dic

tates

ates under the notion, or consideration, of the *Will of God*. Which he illustrates by the following comparison ; *Qui contumeliis officit privatum aliquem, putans eum Regem esse, non privatum, sed Regem ipsum lesisse putatur ; Sic qui Conscientiam contemnit, Deum ipsum contemnit, quia quod Conscientia dicat putatur esse Divina voluntas*. He that reproaches a Man, in a private Capacity, and takes him to be a King, is supposed to reproach the King himself, and not the private Man ; Thus, he who offers contempt to Conscience, offers contempt to God, because what Conscience dictates, is suppos'd to be the *will of God*. Therefore the Dr. concludes, *Hinc semper peccat, qui facit aliquid contra Conscientiam*. It follows from hence, that he *always Sins*, who doth *any thing* against his Conscience.

I was willing to set down the *Drs. words* in the *Original*, lest my fidelity should be suspected in the *translation*. And what have I said more than the Dr. ? Whatever distinction is pretended betwixt *ligat* and *obligat*, 'tis evidently his judgment, that a man always sins, if he doth not follow, even an *erroneous* Conscience ; and certainly where the *neglect* of a thing becomes sinful, we need no other proof, that we are *oblig'd* to do it ; and therefore Mr. F. mistakes the Dr. or he is inconsistent with himself, if he any where asserts, " that *Conscience* doth not oblige, or make that a man's Duty, which is not really so by God's Word. For tho' *materially* consider'd, which is the Drs. own distinction, it be not a *Duty*, or may be even a *Sin*, yet under a *formal* respect, and consider'd as a dictate of *Conscience* ; we sin, if we *do it not*, and that infers *obligation*, and obligation a *Right*. So that upon the whole, I see nothing to make me alter my Sentiments, in *this Proposition*, viz. *That every man is oblig'd to follow the immediate dictates of his Conscience, tho' in themselves they may be erroneous* ; not denying, in the mean time, that, *so far*, as they are erroneous ; so

far the man may be culpable; or if it may express my sense better, tho' a man be blamed for *thinking wrong*, yet he is always obliged to *follow his Thots.* To deny this, is to strip us of our rational Powers, and from intelligent Agents, to make us *stocks and stones*; and where we hit the Truth, 'tis merely by *Chance*, and not by *Counsel*.

And thus, I suppose, my *two Propositions* are clear'd and justify'd; and Mr. F. has lost the advantages, he propos'd, when he forgot the Rules of Civility, and broke the Laws of Friendship, and *proclaim'd on the House-tops, what was spoken in the ear, in Closets*: in which he is the *less* excusable, because what I said, was only in answer to his *own* repeated *Question*, and I should never have committed my *thots* to Paper, had *he* not first, very officiously done it; in terms less pleasing to me, than my own.

He proceeds next to consider, "what *proof* I advance for proving;" (which if I had a mind to play the *Critick*, I would call a *Tautology*) "that such a Right of private Judgment has a Divine War-rant." But lest the Reader should be led into any mistake, and think my Arguments inconclusive, and impertinent: He must be reminded, that the right of Judgment, which I claim for *private* Christians, and others, is not, as Mr. F. wretchedly mistakes, a right of judging (without distinguishing the *apparent* sense from the *real*) *contrary* to the Scriptures; but of bringing every Doctrine to the *Test* of Scripture, and of *rejecting* all that appears repugnant to it, as well as of *imbracing* what appears agreeable with it. Now let us see what he says to my Proofs.

"The only thing from Scripture, (says he) that I find him insisting on, is the example of the *Bere-ans*. But this proves no more than what all his Subscribing Brethren allow; even that every man has a Right, and that 'tis his duty, to examine the Doctrines of all Teachers by the Word of God."

If

If Mr. F. here takes the word, *Examination*, in a proper sense and latitude, as implying, an equal power to *receive* or *reject*, according to the light, in which the Doctrines examined *appear*, then I confess there is a great deal of Truth, in what he says. But this he does not: He only allows a Right to *examine*, but not to *reject* every Doctrine, that *appears* to be false; which, as I observ'd before, is nothing but a meer *nominal* and pretended Right, and not that Right, which the instance of the *Bereans* proves.

I own indeed, that "the result of the examination of the much commended *Bereans*, was entirely agreeable both to the Scripture, and the Apostle's Doctrine, for any thing that appears." But, will it from thence follow, that if the Apostle's Doctrine had *appear'd* repugnant to Scripture, they had no Right to reject it, because it was true in *it self*? I wonder that a *Master* in Israel, should betray his ignorance so far, as once to imagine it. They had certainly as much right to *reject* it, upon its appearing to be false, as they had to *examine* it, before it appear'd to be true. A Right of *rejecting*, being essentially implied in a Right of *examining*: And if Mr. F. denies a Right to examine, in *this latitude*; whatever he pretends, and however he may charge me with a defect of candor, in supposing it, 'tis plain, I had almost said, to *demonstration*, that he would have People, pin their Faith upon other men's sleeves, and see with *other* People's eyes, and receive Doctrines, which they have either not *examined* by the Scripture, or, which amounts to the same, not *found* agreeable to it.

Mr. F. is unwilling to "allow a Liberty of Indifference to embrace or reject the true sense of Scripture". But if Men have not such a Liberty, where the true sense of Scripture is undetermin'd, they have no Right or Liberty to judge at all; the very *Essence* of Judgment falls to the ground. Or should

I for once suppose, that we have not *such* a Right of judging, as to reject the *true* (by which I now mean, the *real*) sense of Scripture, yet I see no advantage from such a Concession, in favour of *imposing* Power ; because no *Synod* can prove, that we have not a right to reject *their* sense of the Scriptures, 'till they have fairly prov'd their sense to be *true*.

He queries, " how the Scripture can be the only Rule, if any Men upon any pretence, have a right to declare Sentiments contrary to it ? " But who pleads for such a right ? All that I plead for, is a right, to use the Scriptures as a *Test* to humane Doctrines. And if this be not making the Scripture a *Rule*, let Mr. F. tell us what is. We are not therefore drove to such a *Dilemma*, as " either to renounce the Right I am pleading for, or to quit claim to the Principle --- *that the Scripture is the only rule of Faith* ". They are another sort of Men, who deny that Principle.

" There is another Text, he says, besides the instance of the Bereans, which I think makes plainly for my right of private Judgment, viz. the Text he preach'd from ; which yet, I think fit to pass over, with this Expression, pag. 9. *If I had preach'd upon this Controversy ex professo, I know not where I could have found a better Foundation to build the Principles of private Judgment upon.* But Mr. F. ought to have remember'd the *Occasion* of that Expression, that I spoke it upon the supposition, that his reasoning from it (in the Sermon he preach'd) was good ; for as he *then* argued, whatever he pretends now, that all Christians were, by *Vertue* of the *Holy Uction* INFALLIBLE, and that infallibility might *infer* a power of Imposition, the Consequence was natural, that Christians (of whom only I was then speaking) had a *Power* of Imposition, and of course, a *Right* of Judgment ; let him but examine the 9th page of my Sermon with care, and he will acknowledge the reasoning to be right.

I am surpriz'd to see him so tamely give up that celebrated Text in *Peter*, viz. *That no Prophecy of Scripture is of any private Interpretation*, it being in my Apprehension the most plausible Text, he could have found, to support his *Subscribing Principles*, and a Text, which it may be he would have greedily enough catch'd at, had not the *Papists* used it before him, against all private Judgment of Christians whatever, and for implicit Faith, or believing as the Church believes, "which, he says, is diametrically opposite to his constantly avowed Principle:" though I think he speaks here with much more Assurance, than Truth, since we must either upon his Principles, go out of the Church, or believe as *that* believes.

However, before he leaves my Right of private Judgment, he will give it a *Name*, that shall if possible, make it odious to all good Men. "I shall observe, says he, that it no less favours Atheists in their Atheism, than Arians in their Arianism; seeing the one may plead the Light of their Conscience and Reason as well as the other:" As if the *Subscribers* did not plead the Light of their Consciences, as well as *we*! and as if *we* did not endeavour to enlighten our Consciences, by the *Scripture* as well as *they*! as if, therefore, the Argument did not strike at *their* right of Judgment, as well as *ours*! But see what palpable mistakes, inconsistencies, and self-contradictions Men often run into, when they have a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge? How is it possible, that we who make the *Word* of God, the profess'd Rule of Conscience, should be number'd with those, or suppos'd to favour them, who deny the very *Being*, and Existence of God? Did we profess indeed to follow the *natural* Dictates of Conscience, without the light and assistance of *Divine* Revelation, the Charge of *Atheism*, or rather *Deism*, would look more specious; but when we not only profess a *God*, but acknowledge the

the Scriptures to be his *Word*, and only plead for such a Liberty of Conscience as to try all things by *that* Rule, then to charge us with favouring *Atheism* in their *Atheism*, is certainly a strain of Language, that has no foundation, but in the Humour of the *Speaker*; and I hope, when Mr. *F.* comes to think in cool blood, he will see the rashness and injustice of such Imputations.

And as for the prodigious growth of Infidelity, in *England*, "where, he says, the *modern* Principles of Liberty have been so unaccountably caress'd", whatever his Opinion of it may be, 'tis more than he can prove, that it does not arise from some *other* Cause: Infidelity may well grow, when the Sufficiency of the Scripture is so generally cried down, and they who call themselves Ambassadors of the *Prince of Peace*, regardless of their Master's Counsel (who hath said, *it shall not be so among you*) begin to affect the *Prebeminence*, and to exercise a *Dominion* over their Brethren: At least, I suppose, we may find Men as conspicuous for Piety, among the *Non-subscribers*, as Mr. *F.* can boast of on the *opposite side*. And I cannot seriously think, that a profess'd Adherence to our Bibles, in opposition to humane Schemes and *Tests*, has any thing like a *direct* Tendency to banish Christian Charity and Vertue, but rather to keep and guard them. And we are not responsible for those Effects that come by *Accident* and *plain Abuse*.

Having dismiss'd my *Right* of Judgment, he comes next to consider, pag. 60. What I offer relating to *Imposition* and imposing Power, and here he says, "that he never us'd the Term of imposing Power, or imposition in speaking of the Authority of Ministers relating to Creeds, but on the contrary, had denied the Exercise of it, to be an imposing on any true Christian." But why should Mr. *F.* maintain Imposition, and yet quarrel with the *Name*? That he maintains *Imposition*, is as clear as the *Sun*. For

For a Doctrine is never more properly impos'd, than when we profess our Assent, from the influence of a *Penalty*, and not from the evidence of the *thing*. And this is the Method Subscribers take.

They condescend (as their Phrase is) on a set of Principles : this set of Principles we must either assert to as true, whether we think them all so or not, or quit claim to *Ministerial*, and *Christian* Communion. And tho' they pretend to allow us a right to *examine* their Principles by the Scripture, yet we must never *reject* them. If this be not IMPOSITION, I don't see, upon what foundation, we charge it upon *Papists* ; since *they* and *Subscribers* agree, in compelling an assent by *Penalty* ; and only differ, in the *nature* and *degrees* of that *Penalty* : So that the Truth is too plain, and has a better foundation, than the *Humour* of the Speaker ; *That the Papists take the Bible out of our Hands, and the Imposers, who leave it in our Hands, pluck out our eyes, and the only recompence we have is, to see with theirs.*

In the next page, he has a Passage, and makes a Concession, that strikes me with *surprise* : " The Reader, says he, may observe in the Sermon, that " I infer no Power at all from the certainty of Faith, " which the Text teaches ; but only, that faithful " Ministers are *capable* of an Authority to determine " Articles of Faith, and to require assent to them". And at the bottom of the pag. he adds, " Mr. S. had " this &c. told him, immediately after his Sermon " was preach'd, which makes him inexcusable, for " publishing his Sermon, without correcting." Let me consider these Passages distinctly. First, he says, " The Reader may observe in the Sermon : " But how is that possible, when he confesses, that what he has publish'd, is not an exact Copy of what he had preach'd ? And *what* may the Reader observe ? " That I infer no power at all from the certainty of " Faith which the Text teacheth." No ! what then,

was the intent of his *Sermon* ? Or did he bestow all that pains, to prove, that *Ministers* had the same *Capacity*, of determining Articles of Faith, which *private Christians* have ? Or, did he think, that if he once prov'd their *Capacity*, we should not dispute their *Authority* ? No. He freely owns, they are different things, and often divided in *Fact*, and borrows a comparison from the *Law* ; where there may be " Men of good judgment, and skill, who are therefore capable of being Justices of the Peace, who yet, have not the Authority of that Office, not having a Commission. " It certainly then behov'd Mr. F. to have prov'd an *Authority* first, and then the Wisdom of God, would have inferr'd a *Capacity* ; and not to spend a *Glass*, in proving a *Capacity*, from whence, it seems, he never pretended to infer an *Authority*. But to proceed ; " Mr. S. he says, had this " told him, immediately after his *Sermon* was preach'd. " I readily own it ; and only wonder, it was not told me before my *Sermon* was preach'd ; when his was censur'd before the Presbytery, and laid the Foundation of such fierce debate, not upon the bare *Capacity* of Ministers, (tho' that would admit of dispute) but the imposing Power that was argued from it. Had he then said, " I have only intended to show, that Ministers have a *Capacity* to determine Articles of Faith, thereby removing the grand objection of fallibility ; but their *Authority* must be argued from other Topicks ; " I dare say, it would have heal'd the differences that arose upon it, and I should never have tho't it my Duty, to preach, what I did. But when I remember'd, that he seem'd, not only to insist upon *Authority*, but to do it as a consequence of *Capacity*, and never, that I know, denied it, 'till I had shown the Absurdity of it, and how it might transfer the Power from *Synods* to *private Christians* ; I could see no obligation, I was under, to correct my *Sermon*, when it went to the Press ; but rather tho't it inconsistent with the fidelity, with which such a

Sermon

Sermon ought to be publish'd; which makes me appear less *inexcusable*, than Mr. F. pretends.

Let us now examine the *Proofs*, he brings, for the *Authority* it self. And, to clear the way, see how he *explains* the power he pleads for; and that both Negatively and Positively.

1. Neg. "I do not plead, says he, 1. For Authority in Church Rulers, obliging a People to their Decisions absolutely, without comparing them with the Scripture." But this is a meer pretence; for while we are not allowed to *reject* their Decisions, if they appear repugnant to Scripture, we are, in effect, forbid to *compare* them with it. And while Mr. F. pretends to "disclaim all dominion over the Faith of Christ's Subjects," from the general drift of his Writings, it appears, that he aims, and aspires at nothing less.

But let us hear the *Second Negative*. "Neither 2dly. do I plead for any Authority to Church Rulers, to force or constrain People, to embrace, or profess, even, the greatest and most important Truths, contrary to even their erring Consciences." But how can that be, when for following the conduct, of what *he* only thinks an erroneous Conscience, we are refused both *Ministerial* and *Church* Communion? Which, tho' it has not yet arriv'd (as *Rome* it self was not built in a day) to the same degree of Compulsion, as a *Spanish Inquisition* carries with it, is yet design'd for the same purpose, viz. to *compel* an Assent to what a Synod shall please to *call*, a necessary Article of Faith.

Let us now hear, what he says, under the Positive Head,

"2dly. Posi. I plead that Church Rulers, have a Ministerial Authority; that is, that they are deputed and subordinate Judges, under the *Lord Jesus*; Authoriz'd to shew, according to Scripture, what his People are to believe and do.----- "And that any who refuse the obedience of Faith, to their

"Doctrines or Decisions, which are according to
 "Scripture, incur the guilt of refusing obedience to
 "Christ himself; whom his Ministers in the due
 "exercise of their Commissioned Authority, do re-
 "present." These words can't be well understood,
 without being acquainted with the *Subscribing Phrase*.
 One that is ignorant of the Cryptick Style, which
 they affect, would think that Mr F. in these Expressions,
 intended to ground obedience to the Decrees of
 a Synod, on the agreement they are *acknowledg'd* to
 have with the *Scripture*. But in the *Subscribing*
 Style, that only is agreeable to Scripture, which a
 Synod of Ministers (let the People judge how they
 will) conclude to be so; and to suspect it is *Damnable*
Heresy. So that Mr. F. must be understood here,
 as pleading for obedience, to all that a Synod shall
think, or say, is agreeable to Scripture. And to prove
 this, he borrows his Arguments from me. "Let us
 "now see, what Mr. Smith" (*an excellent Man, when*
he speaks anything in favour of Subscription) "excel-
 "lently suggests: which I insist upon as a plain
 "proof of the Ministerial Authority, I plead for.
 "And first he tells us pag. 6. that 'they (the Mi-
 'nisters of Christ) are Ambassadors for Christ as he
 'was for the Father: As therefore he revealed all
 'that the Father gave him, and nothing else; so
 'should they, all that he has given them. So runs
 'his Commission; Go, teach all Nations, teaching
 'them to observe all things, whatsoever I have com-
 'manded you.' "Agreeably hereunto, he says p. 7."
 'He (meaning Christ) by his Ministers, yet speaks;
 'Let us see, that we despise not him, that speaks from
 'Heaven, but receive the Word, not as the word of
 'Man, but as it is, indeed, the Word of God; always
 'remembering what Christ has told them, He that
 'despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth
 'me, despiseth him that sent me.' "To which he
 "adds this excellent Comment," 'The contempt ri-
 'ses from us, to Christ, and terminates in his Father.

"A

"A most beautiful Climax ! And indeed nothing " could be spoken more to my purpose, than the " whole of both Passages". More to *his* purpose ! how so ? What do these Passages imply and prove more than *this* ? That Ministers being Embassadors of Christ, we ought to pay the same respects to them, as to Christ Himself ; *so far* as they represent Him, and speak and act *within* the bounds of their *Commission* from Him. 'Tis therefore incumbent on Mr. F. to prove, that a Synod of Ministers always act *within* the bounds of their Commission, when they require obedience to all that they *CALL*, *Articles of Faith*. 'Till this be prov'd, the Passages he cites from me, are nothing to his purpose.

The Authority he claims for Ministers, is founded in their sublime Character of, *Christ's Embassadors* ; They are *his* Embassadors, no further than they act *within* the Bounds of *his* Commission : and they certainly observe the bounds of *that* Commission, no further than what they speak is agreeable to Scripture, where the limits of the Commission are *run*, and fix'd. The only Question to be resolv'd then, is, *Who* shall judge, when they speak according to Scripture, and when they do not ? If *Ministers* themselves ; and *their* judgment be made the Rule ; then a Minister of *Arminian* Principles, must be obeyed, as soon as a *Calvinist* : which opens a Door to every Heresy. If *People* must judge, then they may refuse assent to every Article, that appears unscriptural to *them*, whatever their *Ministers* say to the contrary. And the Passages, which Mr. F. thought so *much* to his purpose, are directly level'd *against* him, and he had little reason to boast, and clap his Wings.

In the two following pages, he is very obscure and confus'd ; but as well as I can trace him, his meaning is ; that I must either allow Ministers a Power, to fix the sense (that is, I suppose, the *true* and *real* sense) of Scripture ; or understand the term, *teach*, in the Apostle's Commission, as only reading

reading and repeating the *words* of Scripture. So that he seems to argue here, from the Name and Character, which the Commission gives, of, *Teachers*.

To which I answer, that tho' I am not such a *Master* of Reason and Eloquence, as Mr. F. might think himself, when he ventur'd his Book to *Harvard Colledge*; yet I am not such a *Boy*, as to "define *teaching* by bare *Reading* or repeating *Scripture Words*?"

Every Teacher must fix a sense upon what he teaches; but it will not follow, that he has fix'd the sense, in which he *ought* to teach. The words of Scripture are certainly *significant* Sounds; and have (with regard to the literal sense) one only fix'd and determinate meaning. But it will not follow, that a particular Body of Ministers, have always hit *that* sense. They may fix a sense upon Scripture, that was not the sense of the *Spirit*. And must we then receive *their* sense, because they have the name of *Teachers*? Verily no. 'Tis the great Duty of Ministers to *search* the Scriptures, and then to give their Hearers the Reasons, that induce them to think, that the sense they have fix'd upon, is *indeed* the sense of the *Spirit*; and according to the force of their Reasons, the Hearers have liberty to give, or with-hold their assent: This is the way to be guided by the *light* and *evidence* of Truth, and not by the *sound*, and authority of *names*. Whereas, upon Mr. F---'s Hypothesis, Mr. *Pierce* himself, being once Ordain'd a Minister of *Christ*, and having thereby, acquired the name of a *Teacher*, might justly impose *his* Sentiments upon us; saying, that Men of his Function and Character, being called "Scribes, well instructed to the Kingdom of God; faithful and wise Servants; faithful Men, able to teach others, it must import more, than that they can read well, audibly and gracefully;" even a *power* to fix and determine the sense of the Scriptures. How will Mr. F. elude this Argument? he will say, perhaps,

perhaps, that Mr. P. was erroneous, and did therefore forfeit the Character, which his Ordination implied. But then, what becomes of his Argument from *Teachers*? If a Man of *that* Character, might be erroneous; by what shall we determine, when the Character implies the *Orthodoxy* of the Person, and when it doth not? Indeed, where Teachers are infallible, as were the Apostles under the *Gospel*, and perhaps the *Levites*, who taught the People, and, (I would have Mr. F. observe) caused 'em to *understand* the reading, under the *Law*; then the sense, *they* fix and determine, must be certainly *right*, & where their infallibility is known, will be never question'd. But, in this case, the ground of assent is infallibility, and not the character of *Teachers*, abstracted from it. And Mr. F. cannot think we should show the same regard to *ordinary* Ministers, merely because they are called *Teachers*; for tho' they have a general *Commission to Teach*, commensurate with their *ordinary* Powers, yet being but *fallible* Men, they have not an Apostle's *capacity* and *qualifications*: And since Mr. F. has, nowhere shown, that they are capable of *determining*, at least, the *Fundamentals* of Christianity, he has said nothing to invalidate his own objection, even with respect to *those Fundamentals*; from whence it follows, that we are not oblig'd to assent to their Doctrines, whether from the Pulpit, or when Con-ven'd in Synods, before we have bro't them to the Test of *Scripture*, and found them agreeable to it; which is all the right I have been pleading for.

As to the Mode of *expressing* Assent, 'tis indifferent to me, whether it be done by *Subscription*, *Viva Voce*, or any other way; could it only be prov'd, that Christ's Ministers have *Authority*, to require it, at least to what they call *Fundamentals*. But as this has never been prov'd, and I am perswaded never can; so after all that Mr. F. has said to destroy the Parallel, *Subscription* is of the same Nature, with me, with

with imposing *unscriptural* Ceremonies, in the Church of *England*; and he that can comply with the one, may also, in my Opinion, submit to the other.

So much for Imposition and imposing Power. He proceeds next to examine what I say to *Creeds*, the Object of it, pointing to the 8th p. of my Sermon, where I say, *We learn that nothing but what Christ has reveal'd in Scripture can be made a necessary Article of the Christian Faith; whatever fine Evasions, &c.* This Consequence was so *natural* and *just*, that Mr. F. rather strives to *evade* than *deny* it; pretending, that "in the Non-subscribing Style, nothing is reveal'd in Scripture, but the express Words of Scripture, & that without any determinate Sense". And "That with Non-subscribers, all Decisions and Determinations of Scripture Doctrines, not express'd in Scripture Words, are humane, and not what is reveal'd in Scripture; however necessarily and clearly deduced from Scripture Words, by the Ministers of Christ". When I read this Passage, I was hardly Master of my Passions. I had almost said *in my haste*, what a better Man had said before me. ----- I defy Mr. F. to produce one Instance, where Non-subscribers declare this to be their Judgment. Nor do I see, how such a Consequence, can with any umbrage of justice be drawn from our Principles. 'Tis true, that we *so far* allow different Men to take the Words of Scripture in contrary Senses, as not to impose *our* sense upon *others*, any more than we would have *them* impose *theirs* upon *us*: But that we carry it *further*, or that this carries it *too far*, is incumbent on my Rev. Brother to prove. And I can assure him, that where the Determinations of a Synod *appear* to be *necessarily* and *clearly* deduced from Scripture Words, I shall freely yield my Assent, (and I believe I may promise the same for all my Brethren) whatever Terms they are cloathed in. And its because I think, that the Doctrine of one Substance in the Sacred *Three*; the proper

proper and perfect Satisfaction of *Christ* alone thro' Faith ; and the like important Principles, are *clearly* and *necessarily* deduc'd from Scripture, that I *profess* and *preach* them, without insisting upon the Conveyance of them, in Scripture Terms : And therefore, it cannot be " Mr. S-----'s Opinion that only " the *Letters* and *Syllables* are revealed", and that the Principles, Mr. F. mention'd, "are humane Traditions, and Commandments of Men, because not " contain'd in Scripture, in so many *express* Words." What foundation then could there be for such a Charge ? I'll tell you Reader, there is a certain thing [called ORTHODOXY] which Mr. F. appropriates to *him* and his *Brethren* ; from thence he concludes that whatever sense *they* fix upon Scripture, is infallibly the sense of the *Spirit*, the Consequence of which he thinks must be, that they who refuse *that* sense, must suppose the Scripture to have *no* sense at all. *Hinc ille Clamor.*

He tells us, p. 75. That when we alledge " that " Creed-makers prefer their Creeds to the Scriptures, and their own words to God's Word ; we " proceed upon a profound Ignorance, of the nature and design of Creeds, --- seeing Subscribers " never pretended that Creeds were the Rule of Faith, but only Tests of a Man's being sound in " the Faith ".

But how can he have the face to say, that they never pretended, that Creeds were the Rule of Faith", or that " they leave the supreme Authority, as a Rule of Faith, entire to the Scriptures, " when 'tis plain, that a Man of the first repute for *Learning*, of strictest *Morals*, and the most unblemish'd *Life*, and who appeals to *Scripture*, as the supreme Authority, and rule of Decision, is refused their Communion unless he also *Subscribe*, or some other way, *assent* to their *Creeds* ? If their *Creeds* must take my assent from the *Scriptures*, which, pray, do I make the *Rule* of my Faith ? Yet this is the case of
F. Creeds.

Creeds. If a Creed be compiled by *Calvinists*, the *Arminian* is condemn'd, tho' he Subscribes the *Scripture*, and is willing to defend his Principles by it. Or if the Creed be *Arminian*, the *Calvinist* must expect the same Treatment: which is so far from leaving the supreme Authority, as a *Rule* of Faith, entire to the *Scriptures*, that they plainly transfer it to their respective *Creeds*. And the Question is now; not, whether a Man believes the *Scripture*, but whether he subscribes my *Creed*. Indeed were I ask'd in what sense I understood a particular Text of Scripture? it would I own be very ridiculous to give my answer in the Words of *that* Text; *Repetition* being no *Explanation*. But that is no reason why I should make *my* sense a *Rule* or *Test* to my *Querist*; I have nothing to do but to shew the *Reason* and *Evidence* upon which my sense is founded. And the same I say of *Synods*, they being made up of *fallible* Men, it would be very incongruous, to make *their* Sentiments a *Rule*, or if there be any Distinction, a *Test* to others. "Methinks the Claim of Authority comes but awkwardly out of the mouths of fallible Men. As for the Church of *Rome* they talk and act consistently. They pretend indeed to be Authoritative Interpreters of Scripture and Masters of Faith; but then they also pretend to be suitably qualified for this Office, by the Spirit of infallibility, that resides among them. But for *Protestants*, that don't pretend to the Qualification, yet to assume the Office, is not very modest. Wou'd it not be a decent Preface to the Decisions of a Protestant Rabbi, "Christian Friends and Brethren, to secure to you the profession of the true Faith, in the several Articles of it, and that you may not fall into error and mistake, relying on your own fallible Judgment, I who am no more infallible than you, and as liable to mistake as you, declare this to be the Faith, and require you to believe thus and thus."

If it be said that Synods may be infallible in *Fundamentals*, and compile a Creed consisting of *them*. I answer, We have no Assurance that they know even *Fundamentals*, without the Unction of the *Holy One*; and 'tis more than possible, that the *Majority* of the Compilers, may be destitute of that Unction. Or if they have it, might possibly *think* some Articles fundamental, that are not *really* so. And therefore no humane Creed can be made an infallible Test of any Man's soundness in the Faith; that's the sole Prerogative of Scripture; and Ministers being commission'd to *teach*, not to *dictate* or *impose*, must cause us to *understand* the reading; and shew us the Harmony of their Doctrines with our *Bibles*. Where this is not done, we must either not assent to their Doctrines at all, or depart from the orthodox Sentiments, and give an *implicit Credit* to our Teachers, and even believe as the *Church* believes.

Mr. F. did not consider, what a fatal blow he gave at the Root of his Cause, when he says, that "Non-subscribers can't seriously think, that the End of Creeds (which is to discover whether a Man be sound in the Faith) could ever be an End, for which God design'd the Scriptures;" for how can he prove that *this* was not the *End* of the Scriptures, but upon the supposition, that they are *insufficient* to answer such an End? And if they are *insufficient*, why do Subscribers argue the Orthodoxy of their *Creeds* from their Harmony with them? Or, how do they know *themselves* to be sound in the Faith? which yet is necessary, *previously* necessary, to the Imposition of *their* Faith upon us. I am afraid his Brethren will severely chastise him for such an egregious Blunder as this; for attempting to establish the Authority of Creeds upon an Argument that directly and plainly subverts it; unless his Zeal, which has *here*, out-run his Knowledge, should make amends for the defects of his Reason.

His next Argument against a profess'd Adherence to Scripture, as the only Test of Orthodoxy, he takes from the use that *Herericks* might make, and have made of it : And gives pag. 77. a particular instance in "*Biddle's* Scriptural Catechism ; in which " he maintains the Anthropomorphite Absurdities of " a *God* of humane shape, finite, and confin'd to " Heaven, together with all the Socinian Irreligion."

But this is the very Shibboleth of the *Papists*, the very Argument by which they justify their taking the Bible out of the *Laity's* Hands.

" There are some things in Scripture, hard to be " understood, which the unlearned and unstable " wrest, to their own destruction : 'tis therefore unsafe to trust it in their Hands, and much more expedient to keep it in our own, and give them our " Comments and Interpretations for their Rule." I wonder, my Rev. Brother, who was so cautious of using a *Text* before, which the *Papists* had used, pag. 59. to bad purposes ; should now come to borrow an Argument from them ; especially, since this affinity in their *Dialect*, might tempt unthinking People to suspect, too great an affinity in their *Principles*.

But lest he should call this *Evasion*, I will speak directly to his objection. ----- The Blasphemies of a *Biddle*, are either *native* Consequences from the Scripture, or *abusive*. To say they are *native*, is to justify his Blasphemies, and to throw the reflection of them upon the *Bible* ; being such an *obscure* Book, that a Man must either run into Blasphemous notions of the *Diety*, or not draw a *native* Consequence from it. But if such Consequences be *abusive*, that concludes nothing against the Right we have to use the Scriptures, as our *Rule* and *Test*. This is the reply, which * *Protestants* make to *Papists* ; and the

* Scripturam quidam pervertunt, suo exitio, non *Lectiois*, sed suo vitio. V-Mastricht, Theol. p. 34.

same Answer, I suppose, may serve to the same Argument, out of a *Subscriber's* Mouth ; who is so zealous against erroneous Judgments, that rather than they should lead us into mistakes, he will charitably *pluck out* our Eyes, and lend us the use of *his* ; and then we should be sure, not " to turn the House of God into a Den of Thieves.

He is not a little angry, that I should say, his Doctrine of *imposition*, is a Doctrine of *pernicious* Consequence, and asks me, " how ? " I answer, 'tis a pernicious Doctrine, that cries down the *sufficiency* of the Scripture, as a *Rule* of Faith, and *Test* of Orthodoxy ; That is not afraid to declare, that *Man's* words are better than *God's*, for such a *Test* : That gives no *proper* liberty to search the Scriptures : That allows *some* Ministers dominion over the *Faith* of their Brethren : That strikes at the *foundation* of Protestant Principles ; and in a word, *destroys all* Christianity. For since one Synod imposes upon no other foundation, than a firm *perswasion* of their being in the right, the *same perswasion*, gives the *same Authority* to another ; and by that means, a Synod of *Hereticks* may come, at length to govern the Church, and to " turn the House of God " into a Den of Thieves. " Nor can this be said to be by *abuse*, but by the most *native* tendency ; *perswasion* of Truth being the *common* foundation, upon which they *all* impose ; or if it were by *abuse*, the argument holds as strong, applied to *Creeds*, as it does to *Scripture*.

Let us see how Mr. F. states and answers, *some* of the things, that are here objected.

" I know says he, *pag. 79.* it's alledg'd, that if " Power be allowed to the Orthodox, to exclude any from the Church ; others will claim an equal " right to do so by sound Christians ; but sure there " can be no reason, why a man, that has right, should " not assert it, and act suitably to it ; because another, who has no right, will pretend to it. Neither " can

“ can there be any reason, why, because a lawful Magistrate, exercises a just and legal Government ; therefore a *Usurper* may play the Tyrant : Which is exactly a parallel case, with what is supposed in the objection.” An exact *subscribing Parallel* ! Mr. F. and his Brethren are the lawful Magistrate ; and others, should they pretend to impose, are *Usurpers* and *Tyrants* ! But I must take the freedom to correct him, and set the objection in a fairer light, and then submit his *parallel* to the Readers Judgment. What we alledge is *this, viz.* That where the Orthodoxy of a Doctrine is disputed ; it doth not *appear*, that one Man ought to *impose* his opinion, or be *excluded* from the Church, as a Heretick, more than another ; and what relation has this to Mr. F.--’s *lawful* Magistrate, that is, one *acknowledg’d* to be so, and a *Usurper* playing the Tyrant ? If he has no better Talent, at running parallels, I advise him, to leave it to *exacter* hands. But let us see, whether he acquits himself any better in the other Objection.

“ Again, says he, some alledge, that if we ascribe power to *Protestants* to require assent to *their* Creeds, there is the same reason, why *Papists*, should claim a power to impose *theirs*. Of this mind Mr. S. seems to be &c.” To which Mr. F. replies, “ That supposing a Man settled in Protestant Principles, and knowing, that Popery is made up of Superstition &c. it’s a Contradiction to suppose, that he really thinks, that if Protestants have Authority from God, to require assent, to what the man knows to be certainly the Doctrine of the Gospel, according to Scripture, that there’s equal reason, why the *Papists* should have the like Authority, to require assent, to what the man knows certainly from Scripture, to be wrong and wicked.”

What certainty Mr. F. pretends to have of the *Protestant* Doctrines, in opposition to what the *Papists* maintain, I know not. But I believe, I stand

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at as great a distance from *Popery*, and am as well settled in *Protestant* Principles as he ; And yet I can't say, I have any more than a *moral* certainty of them, from the holy Scriptures. And when I say, I am *certain*, that *Protestants* are in the right, and *Papists* in the wrong ; I can only mean, that according to the best light and information, I can receive from the Scriptures, my *judgment* is thus fully determin'd ; And therefore, I see no contradiction implied, in what is objected, against the Imposition of *Protestant* Doctrines. For if we impose *our* Principles, upon a firm *Belief*, and determination, that what we maintain is *Truth*, certainly the same determination in *Papists*, must justify the Imposition of *Popish* Doctrines. Nor doth this infer, that there is no such thing as *Truth* ; but that 'tis not sufficient to *impose* a Doctrine because we *judge* it to be true. And I would only further observe, that if the Protestant Doctrines, be so *clearly* reveal'd in Scripture, as the terms, Mr. F. uses, seem to imply ; a Man of *sincerity* and *common capacity*, will quickly receive the *Evidence*, and the *Imposition* of them become needless. And I think, we might take it, as a safe rule, that where the evidence of things is so bright, as to *warrant* an Imposition, there it will never *need* it.

Mr. F. allows, that a Right to examine all Doctrines by the Scripture, is the foundation, upon which the Reformation was made, and has ever since stood, if taken in the *sound* sense, in which *he* (who is always *sound*) formerly explain'd it. But if I understand it of " a Liberty of indifferency, or a Right to judge for, " or against the true sense of Scripture &c. He says, " that the Reformation never did stand upon such a " rotten foundation." It requires a better judgment than mine, to *determine*, what he means here, by the *true sense* of Scripture. If he intends any *other* sense, than what the Reformers *determin'd* to be true ; 'tis more than *he*, or they, can prove, that *they* did not judge contrary to it. For they certainly proceeded
upon

upon what they judged to be true, and upon nothing else ; infomuch, that the *Truth* of their Doctrines, would never have mov'd them to reform from Popery ; had they not been *perswaded* of it. Whence it follows, that whoever denies us a liberty, of being govern'd by our *perswasion* of Truth, under the pretence of its being wrong, denies the Principles of the first Reformers, and strikes at the foundation of the Protestant Doctrines ; so that I had well enough consider'd, when I often wonder'd, how the *Protestant* and the *Imposer* could meet in the same Man.

He now takes *his* turn to wonder, " at the assurance of Non-Subscribers in saying, that making " and requiring assent to Creeds, was inconsistent " with the Principles of the Reformation ; And gives two learned Reasons ; First, " Because then all the " Churches of the Reformation went contrary to " their own Principles : there not being one Reformed Church without her Creed or Confession." A very weighty Argument ! as if the Reformed Churches could not, *possibly*, act contrary to their own Principles ; especially under the influence of such Temptations, as Power and Superiority carry with them. We frequently observe such inconsistencies in *private Christians*, and *particular Ministers*, and why should we think it impossible, in Reformed Churches ? Nay, if what Mr. F. boldly affirms, be true, viz. " That there is not one Reformed Church " without her Creed, or Confession," and that Creed or Confession, no doubt imposed ; 'tis evident in fact, that they *have* gone contrary to Reforming Principles, and, whether it infer *Ignorance* or *Stupidity*, made a manifest infringement upon the very foundation of the *Reformation*.

Secondly, " He says, if that could be supposed, " it's strange that their Enemies, that waited for their " halting, never told them of it." But whom does he mean by their *Enemies* ? *Non-Subscribers*, or *Papists* ? If *Non-Subscribers* ; He cannot say, they never

ver told them of it. If *Papists*; there is no reason to wonder, that *they* have not: They are rather *pleased*, to see their Principles so *unaccountably caress'd* by Protestants; and have some secret hopes, that Ecclesiastical matters may come again to the *old pass*; That from lodging Infallibility and Imposition, in a *plurality*, they may at length, come to acknowledge one Catholick Head, and call *St. Peter's SUCCESSOR, Master upon Earth*.

Mr. F. now comes to make his Remarks upon my *Conclusion*: And here, tho' "he readily owns, that "Scriptures were useless without reason &c. yet he "could not but take notice that Mr. *Smith* says, *My Reason is the eye to direct me by it*, meaning the "Scripture; because I add no distinguishing epithet, to make a difference, between meer natural "unsanctify'd Reason, and an Understanding enlightned by the Spirit."

By which I suppose, he would have me lay aside my own *unsanctify'd* reason, and use the Scriptures, by the *enlighten'd* eyes of *him*, and his *Brethren*; with whom, no doubt, Wisdom shall dy; at least, I think he must mean, that the Scriptures are a useless Rule, without the eye of *sanctify'd* Reason, and therefore all the *unsanctify'd* have not a right to judge for themselves; but the mischief is, that this will strike at the Authority of *Synods*, where *they* are *unsanctify'd*; and who shall be judge, when they are so, and when they are not?

He says, he "should not have notic'd this expression, but that the Principles, which Mr. S. declares for, in opposition to Creeds; (being all "Arminian, in their Original) are founded in the "sufficiency of Reason, without supernatural Illumination, &c."

Are the Principles, I declare for, all *Arminian*, in their Original? Is there such a necessary connection betwixt *Arminianism*, and the right of private Judgment which I have been pleading for? Then

it will follow, either that Mr. F. has mistaken the Sentiments of the Orthodox, upon the present Controversy, or that all the *Orthodox* Principles in the point of private Judgment, are originally *Arminian*: For *they* allow, all that I have pleaded for, *viz.* That we must see Truth with our *own* eyes, in the great Summary of Divine Truth, *viz.* the *Scripture*, and not give an *implicit* credit to *any* Teachers, pag. 49. I can't tell how such reasoning may relish with his Brethren; but if they be *Calvinists*, I think it has cut off their pretensions to the *Orthodox* Character, so far at least, as the present Debate extends: And as I have always my self opposed *Arminian* Principles, so I am made a Heretick too, and have as little reason as any body, to thank him for an Argument, that has only obliged *Arminians* themselves; and if true, I dare say, would bring them in, a *Store* of Profelytes.

I wish this may give him an occasion for an after Thought.

In the close of my Sermon, I said, That I honour'd *Synods* and *Councils*, as they preserve Agreement among Pastors, &c. But, says Mr. F. "how can they be honour'd when no Authority is allowed them, and consequently no Warrant for what they do?" He thinks, they are not sufficiently honour'd, unless we allow them, what the Apostles themselves disclaim'd, even, a *Dominion over our Faith*. All the Authority and Honour, with which the Scripture has cloath'd them, avails him nothing, so long as he sees our Consciences refuse to bow to their Lordly Decisions; or while we are resolv'd to attend *the voice from the excellent Glory, This is my Beloved Son, hear ye HIM*.

"And then, he enquires, how can they preserve agreement among Pastors, when they may not exclude from their Society, or that of the Church, even a *Biddle*, or *Valentinus*, much less an *Arian*, *Socinian* &c. unless he intends an Agreement to

"agree

"agree in nothing: which looks more like a Conspiracy against the Church of God, than a desirable Agreement."

I suppose he was not a little pleas'd with himself, when he hit upon that witty Expression, viz. *An Agreement to agree in nothing*: Especially if he can prove it to be a *Conspiracy against the Church*. But doth *all* Agreement consist in a Union of *Opinions*? May not Ministers, who have some difference in their Sentiments, unite in their *Affections*? And by frequently convening, cultivate their Friendship, improve themselves, know the Condition of their respective Charges, and better consult the *common* Interest of Churches? These would always be the natural fruits of *Synods* and *Councils*, were it not for *opinionated Zealots*, that presently think themselves *infallible*, and make their Sentiments a *Test*, and forbid those to cast out *Devils*, who follow not *them*. And as for the Men, and Principles which he mention'd; if their Errors are not so *palpable*, as to be easily refuted by *Argument*; 'tis a great Question, whether *they* ought to be excluded by *Authority*; since the *Scripture*, (if *that* be allowed to have any Authority) directs *Ministers* to *exhort* and *convince* Gainfayers; and the *Heretick*, whom *Titus* is commanded to reject, is said to be *Self-condemn'd*; not One, that labour'd under an erroneous Conscience; but one that went counter to his *Light* in the pursuit of his *Lusts*, and held the Truth in unrighteousness: which, by the way, can be no just precedent for *us*, who have not the *Apostolical* Gift of *discerning* Spirits, to proceed against those, who, as far as appears, sincerely endeavour to inform their Consciences, with a firm resolution to obey their Dictates.

Mr. F. could not conclude his Book, nor take leave of my Sermon, without an instance of his usual *Charity*, in suggesting to the World, that I play'd the *Hypocrite*, and call'd his *Confession of Faith*, an excel-

lent Composure, and an Incomparable Piece, only as a cover for *unsound* Principles. The terms of Respect, he allows, are *high*; but says, they "can satisfy none, in what I agree, with that Confession; seeing, I will freely declare, that I do not agree with every thing in it: And it's plain, my side of the present Controversy, is opposite to several important Articles of that Confession: And it's to be tho't I would look on it to be Imposition, to desire me to point out what I agreed with, and what not." I never was so reserv'd in my Principles, as not to declare, and that very *freely*, that there might be an Article or two, in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which did not look to me, so clear as they *should*, to gain my assent: And tho' I should think it a great Imposition, for any of my Brethren to *require*, I should think it *none*, to *desire* me, to point out, what I agreed with, and what not; provided, my Compliance, should not be pleaded, to support Imposition upon others who differ from me: But as plain as my Eagle-eyed Brother may think it to be, it may cost him some pains to *prove*, that "my side of the present Controversy is opposite to several important Articles of that Confession." The *Confession of Faith* it self declares Chap. 31. that "all Synods or Councils, since the Apostles times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have err'd; therefore they are not to be made the Rule of Faith or Practice, but to be used as an Help in both." I was surpris'd to find my Judgment so exactly copied, and my Principles so well express'd, in such a Book as this. The *Premises* here and the *Conclusion*, are both *my own*.

It has always been a Principle with me, that there is no Synod since the *Apostles* Day, but what may err; and from thence I have inferr'd, that I ought not to make *their* Decisions my Rule; it being in my judgment, essential to a Rule, that it should be always the *same*, and beyond possibility of *erring*; tho'

tho' at the same time I use them as *Helps* to assist my Interpretations of Scripture, and thankfully receive the Light which they give me ; therefore I have assign'd it as one Reason in my *Sermon*, why I honour'd *Synods* and *Councils*; viz. That they were of *vast Service in the illustration of Scripture* ; and mention'd the *Westminster Confession* as a *standing Evidence* of what I had asserted : It is therefore impossible that my " side of the present Controversy should be " opposite to several important Articles of *that* Confession ; " unless the Confession be plainly inconsistent with it self, and allow, in one place, what it contradicts in another.

As to my Soundness in the Faith ; if the Subjects I have preach'd upon, in several parts of the *Province*, the Sermons I have lately publish'd and dispers'd, the constant use I make of the *Assembly's shorter Catechism* in my own *Church*, and the very great Value I have always express'd for it ; if this can give Satisfaction, I have given enough. But if nothing less than a manifest invasion upon the Rights of Conscience, and the imposition of my Judgment upon others, can give me the *Title* of an *Orthodox Minister*, I must be content to go without it.

Thus have I finish'd my Remarks upon Mr. *Fisher's Postscript*. I tho't they would have drawn me out to a greater length, but I quickly found that the Author had spent a great many Pages in confuting his own mistakes, and where I found him running upon a *false Hypothesis*, I tho't it sufficient to destroy *that* ; and this is the Reason that I have sometimes let particular Pages go without my Remarks. If any Expression appear too *warm*, I shall not defend but wish it *unsaid* ; the *force* of my Reasons my Reader will judge, which he might do the better if he would first examine my *Sermon*. I expect my Opponent will bestow an Answer upon me, but I assure him the Debate is so disagreeable to me, and I have
such

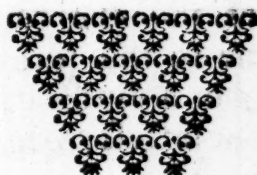
such a small Prospect of convincing a Man whose fundamental Principle is *Infallibility*, that it must be something of extraordinary Consequence to my *Character* and *Station*, that provokes me to draw my Pen, upon such a Subject as *this* again.

I conclude with a very pathetic Admonition of Mr. *Baxter's* to "those that are so eager to tie all Men to their Expositions of Scripture, & censure all for Heretical, that differ from them therein. When we have disputed, says he, and contended our selves a-weary, and wrangl'd the Church into Flames and Ashes; yet that which God hath spoken obscurely, and so left difficult in it self, will remain obscure and difficult still; and that which is difficult thro' the weakness and incapacity of unlearned Men, will be far better clear'd by a rational Explication, than by a bare Canon. O when will the Lord once perswade his Churches to take his written Word for the *only* Canon of their Faith! And that in its own naked Simplicity and Evidence, *without* the Determinations and Canons of Men! which are no *parts* of our Creed, but *helps* to our Understandings, and *bounds* to our Practice in matters *Circumstantial*; when will the Lord perswade us not to be wise above what is written."

"Two things have set the Church on fire, and been the plagues of it, above one thousand years
1. Enlarging our Creed, and making more Fundamentals than ever *God* made.

2. "Composing (and so imposing) our Creeds and Confessions in *our own* words and phrases. When men have learned more manners and humility, than to accuse God's language, as too general and obscure (as if they could mend it) and have more dread of God, and compassion on themselves, than to make those to be Fundamentals or Certainties, which *God* never made so; and when they reduce their confessions, 1. To their due extent; and 2. To Scripture phrase (that Dissenters may not
"scruple

“ scruple Subscribing ;) Then, and (I think) never
 “ till then shall the Church have peace about Doc-
 “ trinals. *It seems to me no heinous* SOCINIAN mo-
 “ tion *which* CHILLINGWORTH is *blam’d for,*
 “ *viz.* [Let all men believe the Scripture, and that
 “ only, and *endeavour* to believe it in the true sense;
 “ (and promise this) and require no more of o-
 “ thers ; and they shall find this not only a *better,*
 “ but the *only* means to suppress Heresie, and restore
 “ Unity, &c.]” Such passages as these, from a Man
 of Mr. *Baxter’s* Reputation for Learning and Piety,
 have as great weight and authority with me, as
 Mr. *F--’s ipse Dixit’s,* and groundless assertions can
 have with any *Subscriber.*



AP.

An APPENDIX.

I Appear not in this *Appendix*, as a Second to the Reverend Author of the *Right of private judgment vindicated*; I have too good an opinion of his cause and capacity, to think he needs one.

But being brought in, as the Author of the *Controversy* a-foot amongst us, and charg'd with "advancing the new vamped right of private judgment, vastly different, from that right of private judgment common to men, or that private judgment of discerning allow'd by our Divines to believers," by my Rev. Brother *Fisher*; I have (to use his Phrase) no choice but either to meet him in his own way, or by silence to own the justice of the charge. Reputation and Friends determine me to the former: However I design no reprisals, but a vindication of my self from some of the most groundless *thrusts*, that were ever made at a man's character.

And as he appeals to my Notes, I have perus'd them, and can find no paragraph, or passage that relates to private judgment, but these that follow; which make up an entire and distinct head of the Sermon refer'd to, viz. "They (*Ministers*) must teach with meekness & humility, as *fallible men*. They must not dictate or impose their own interpretations or sense of Scripture on their hearers, for the rule of faith, and practice, in controverted and disputable Points. --- They must so teach as to leave men to, as every man undoubtedly has the right of private judgment; --- And not arrogantly impose what we ad-

vance

vance, (*here I change the person*) as equal with the
 "inspired writings, as to its *infallibility*. ---- But we
 "are to make use of the same gentle methods of
 "teaching, that Christ and his Apostles did : the
 "soft and easy way of argument and persuasion.
 "We must mildly, and calmly reason with them out
 "of the *Scriptures*, and with all long-suffering, and
 "mildness, persuade and beseech them to be recon-
 "ciled to God."

And is this the new vampt right of private judg-
 ment, against which there is rais'd such an out-cry,
 of *Atheism, Deism, Arianism, Arminianism, Socinian-*
ism, Scepticism &c? Is this doctrine *vastly different*
 from that right of private judgment common to men ;
 or that private judgment of discerning, allow'd by
 our Divines to believers? Our Divines are surely
 little beholden to him, for the representation and
character he has given of them : and men, and be-
 lievers, less to them, for their allowance. Had the
 charge come from the mouth of a *Romish Priest*, I
 should not have wondred at it ; but I own, I am
 perfectly surpriz'd that a zealous protestant minister,
 should pass such a censure on such tenets.

Where can the *vast difference* lie ! To me, the
 passages, turn'd the other way, wou'd sound most
 oddly : and so turn'd they must be, to make them
vastly different. Let's try two or three of 'em, on
 which, if any, the imputation must be fix'd. I have
 said, "they must not dictate or impose their own
 "sense &c." The proposition *vastly different* will
 run *thus*, Ministers must dictate, or impose their own
 sense or interpretation of Scripture, on their hearers,
 for a rule of faith, and practice, in controverted and
 disputable points.

I have said, "We must not arrogantly impose what
 "we advance as equal &c." that which *vastly differs*
is, we must arrogantly impose what we advance, as
 equal with the inspir'd writings, as to its *infallibility*,
 even in controverted and disputable points. (For of

H

such

such it is obvious I was speaking) I think the consequence too plain to need, and too gross, to bear a mention.

And I confess my self altogether at a loss, to find out the *vast difference*, betwixt what I have advanc'd, and what Mr. F. declares he takes to be the opinion of the orthodox, concerning a right of private judgment common to men; in the 49. p. of his book.

I have asserted " that ministers must not dictate or impose &c. " The orthodox, and consequently Mr. F. (for I know his value for *orthodoxy*) " that every man has a right to reject errors by whomsoever taught, and not to suffer themselves to be imposed upon, by falsehoods, &c. " Which I think amounts to the same thing, for in controverted and disputable points, but one side can be true. Where therefore two ministers of different opinions, pretend to impose their own sense on their hearers, these have a right to reject the imposition of one of them at least, and consequently the minister has none to impose.

I have asserted, " we must so teach as to leave men to &c. " Mr. F. " that every man has a right to try all Doctrines by the Scriptures, which are delivered unto them, &c. not giving implicit credit to any Teachers, and that because God refers us ultimately to his Word, &c.

And what, I pray, have I asserted more, or less? He must have better eyes at least than I, to see the *vast difference*, if any at all betwixt them. So that if Mr. F. has in this born publick testimony to truth, it was very unkind in him, (to say no worse) to insinuate, that I had born publick testimony to error, without alledging a single passage, out of my discourse, to support the invidious reflection. Or does Mr. F. think that the same thing can be true in the orthodox, and false in non-subscribers? Or that he is as infallible in his censures of his brethren, as in his opinions?

But I leave the world to make the scrutiny, to find out the *vast difference*, betwixt the right of private judgment I have advanc'd, and that which Mr. *F.* takes to be the opinion of the orthodox, and Mr. *F.* to reconcile the contradiction.

But before I give over, I must take liberty to inform the Reader, that the Sermon appeal'd to, was preach'd before the Presbytery, submitted to their censure, and enter'd --- *approv'd in the main*; which (by the way) is more than Mr. *F.*'s Sermon ever was; and the very reason of such a restricting clause, was Mr. *Fisher's* own objection; while the rest of the Brethren, for any thing I know, were well satisfied: particularly I remember the Reverend Mr. *Stobo*, (who, to do him justice, is no Non-subscriber) said, it was a good sound discourse, and only excepted against the delivery by Notes. So that whoever of his Brethren advised him to print, I am perswaded they never advised him to meddle with my Sermon, which they had approv'd.

Nor had Mr. *F.* any reason to account for his, by mine. Had he recollected the *Letter* he sent me upon the Controversy, which I answer'd with silence; and the *Manuscript* put into Mr. *S.*'s hands, design'd for the Press, and the confutation of the *Bishop of Bangor*, he must have own'd himself the *Aggressor*, and not thrown the odium upon me. But I heartily forgive him the wrong, expecting the same of him, if I have done him the least injustice in this Vindication: and pray God that we may not be left to *bite and devour one another*, lest we be consum'd one of another.

N. Bassett.

F I N I S.

